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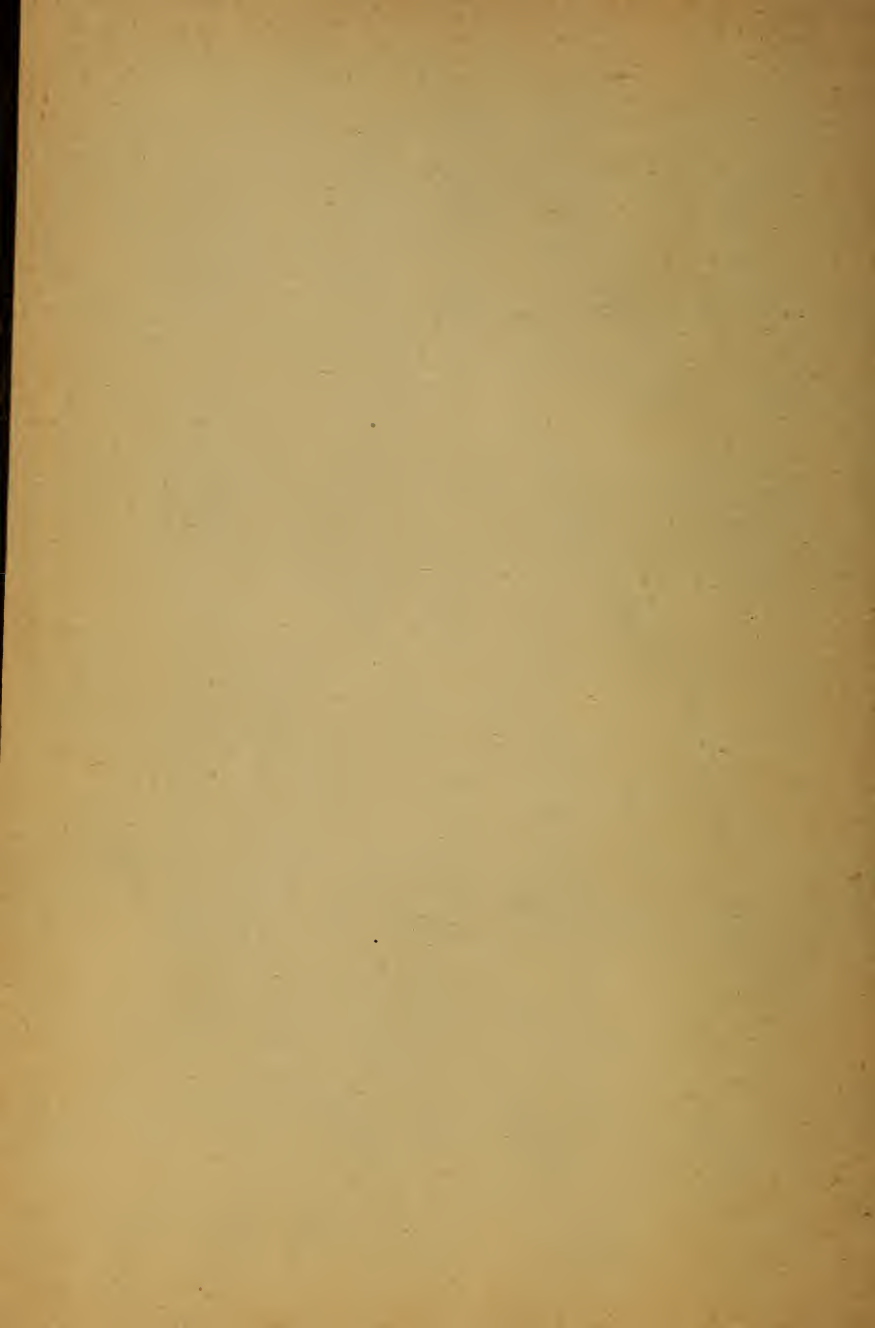
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THE  
HISTORICAL FOUNDATION  
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Johnson, James R.

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# HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

OF

# CHRISTIANITY.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF ARGUMENT FOR THE AUTHEN-  
TICITY OF THE GOSPELS AND THE SUPER-  
NATURAL CHARACTER OF JESUS.

BY

A LAYMAN.

*"I seek to understand in order that I may believe; and I  
believe in order that I may understand."*—After ANSELM.

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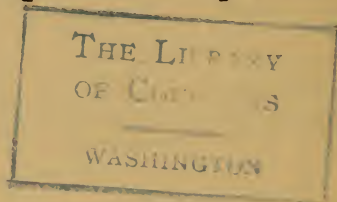
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## PREFACE.

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THIS little book lays no special claim to originality. It is an attempt to present a brief outline of the historical argument which is unfolded at greater length in many valuable works now before the public. Such an outline, it is believed, will be useful to many who have not the opportunity or the inclination to undertake the perusal of larger works. And even to those who have some familiarity with the subject, a comprehensive summary—allowing the main points to be taken in at a glance—may be of advantage. It is a matter of regret that the work of abridgment necessarily deprives some of the arguments of a

measure of their force. If too brief in some cases, the outline presented in these pages may still be serving a useful purpose if it awakens and directs inquiry. Fuller information on special points may be obtained from such works as those mentioned in the notes.

J. R. J.

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# THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE GOSPELS ARE AUTHENTIC HISTORICAL RECORDS.

THE Christian religion rests upon a foundation of *facts*. It did not originate in an obscure legendary age, but within the period of well-defined history; in the age of Cicero and Cæsar, of Horace and Seneca;—an age of literary and philosophic culture. The life of Cæsar is an unquestionable portion of history. So is the life of Jesus. Beside other sources of information,<sup>1</sup> four narratives based upon the observation of eye-witnesses,

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<sup>1</sup> If we had no earlier sources of information than the Christian writings of the second and third centuries, we would be no worse off than we are for the life of Alexander the Great, which comes to us only through sources several hundred years later than his own time, and yet is truly historical.

have transmitted the story of his life. These will first engage our attention. Without entering, for the present, upon the question as to whether they were given by inspiration, let us look at some of the proof by which they are authenticated as trustworthy histories.

*THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE.*

1. In the libraries of Europe there are more than seven hundred Greek manuscript copies of the Gospels, in whole or in part, written at different times from the 4th to the 15th century. The Gospels are therefore as old as the 4th century. <sup>1</sup>

2. Between A. D. 150 and 620 the Gospels were translated twice into Latin, three times into Syriac, once each into Coptic (Lower Egypt), Sahidic (Upper Egypt), Gothic, Armenian, Æthiopic (Abyssinia); and these ten versions have remained in existence as separate and independent witnesses to the antiquity of the Gospels.

3. Valuable information as to the date and authorship of the Gospels is obtained from

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<sup>1</sup> An account of ancient manuscripts and versions may be seen in Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*, articles "New Testament" and "Versions;" in Scrivener's *Introduction*, and in critical editions of the *Greek Testament*.

early writers. We will begin with those who lived about the year 200; to wit, IRENÆUS bishop of Lyons (born about the year 130, and suffered martyrdom, according to Gregory of Tours, in 197); CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (born about 150, died about 220); TERTULLIAN of Carthage (born about 160, died about 220); ORIGEN, the great scholar of Alexandria (born about 185, died in 254); HIPPOLYTUS of Rome (suffered martyrdom about 235); and CYPRIAN of Carthage (martyr in 258). From the writings of these men, to say nothing of Eusebius, Jerome, and others who lived later, it is clear that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were universally accepted in their day as authentic records of the life of Christ; that their authorship was ascribed to those whose names they now bear; and that they were quoted as final authority in religious controversy.

Irenæus and Tertullian each quote or refer to the Gospels about four hundred times, and two-thirds of the New Testament is found in the extant works of Origen.

Not only do the writers of this period mention the general esteem in which the Gospels were held in their day as authentic

records, but in support of the common opinion they appeal to sure historical evidence. The course of history from the Apostles downward must have been spread before the Christian Church with considerable distinctness. Hegesippus, we know, committed to writing the apostolic history (or memorials) from the crucifixion to his own time (A. D. 170). This is now lost. The men of this time had in their hands much valuable literature, which has since perished,—such as the writings of Melito of Sardis, Quadratus bishop of Athens, Ariston of Pella, Aristides a philosopher of Athens, Claudius Apollinaris, and Miltiades.

The great school of Christian instruction in those days was located at Alexandria. Here also were the rich libraries, and in the shadow of these the schools of Greek philosophy, the resort of learned men from all parts of the world, in their restless search after truth. Some of these philosophers became ardent champions of the new religion. They had ample opportunities for examining its credentials; and the fact that they accepted it at the peril of torture and martyrdom is sufficient proof of their sincerity.



As to the text itself, Origen (A. D. 220-240) tells us that he had consulted "very ancient copies;" and Irenæus (A. D. 180-190), on another portion of the New Testament, appeals to the "good and ancient copies."

The indirect testimony<sup>1</sup> of the writers already mentioned is confirmed by that of others (though more fragmentary) as we go back towards the time of the Apostles.

THEOPHILUS, who became bishop of Antioch about the year 169, composed a commentary on the four Gospels combined.

The philosopher ATHENAGORAS (A. D. 170-180), who undertook to write a work against Christianity, but became convinced during his

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<sup>1</sup> In courts of justice, the rules of evidence are arbitrarily narrowed down to that which it is supposed cannot work injustice under any combination of circumstances. The principle is adopted that it is better for nine guilty men to escape than that one innocent person should suffer. The historian, however, is free to accept evidence of all kinds at its true value. If it were not so, there would be an end of history. Who has any doubt that Peter the Great worked at ship-building, or that Cæsar made himself a revolutionist by crossing the Rubicon? And yet our knowledge of these facts rests upon second-hand testimony. The transactions of every-day life are based almost entirely upon the same kind of evidence.

investigations and composed a work in favor of it, was acquainted with the four Gospels.

APOLLINARIS (about 165), who was versed, according to Eusebius, in all literature sacred and profane, refers to the Gospels of Matthew and John.<sup>1</sup>

Fragments of MELITO of Sardis (A. D. 157-180) and POLYCRATES of Ephesus furnish collateral evidence for the fourth Gospel.

The historian Eusebius tells us that PANTÆNUS (A. D. 175-190) found Matthew's Gospel in use in India, where it had been left by the Apostle Bartholomew.

Fragments of HEGESIPPUS (A. D. 157-180) contain traces of Matthew and Luke.

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<sup>1</sup>It seems unnecessary to burden these pages with references to chapter and section. These will be found in all the larger works on the subject, such as Westcott's *History of the Canon*. The works of the early writers themselves are accessible to the English reader in Clark's *Ante-Nicene Library*. Nor is it necessary in this connection to enumerate the quotations which they make from the Epistles and other books of the New Testament.

The fact that many of these writers are silent as to some of the Gospels is no proof that they were unacquainted with them, as has been shown by Sanday, in his valuable work, *The Gospels in the Second Century*. London, 1876, pp. 38, 39, 288.



The CLEMENTINE HOMILIES, about the year 160, quote the four Gospels.

The MURATORIAN CANON, about A. D. 170 (mutilated at the beginning), after referring, apparently, to Mark, mentions Luke as the third and John as the fourth book.<sup>1</sup>

The Epistle of the churches of LYONS and VIENNE, A. D. 177, quotes from Luke and from the Gospel and first Epistle of John.

The Epistle to DIOGNETUS, the date of which is usually placed about A. D. 150, quotes from Matthew and John.

Of no small value is the testimony of JUSTIN MARTYR, a philosopher, who was born at Nicopolis, in 103, and suffered martyrdom at Rome, about 148, or possibly as late as 166. So abundant are his quotations that

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<sup>1</sup> The order in which the Gospels stand in our Bibles, and in nearly all manuscripts, is the logical, if not the chronological, order:—1st. The Gospel for the Jew; 2d. The Gospel for the Roman; 3d. The Gospel for the Greek, as the representative of universal humanity; 4th. The Gospel for a more advanced stage of Christian growth, written by our Lord's most intimate friend long after the other Apostles were dead, and disclosing higher and more spiritual conceptions of Christ's character and work. See Prof. Gregory, *Why Four Gospels?* N. Y., 1876.

quite an epitome of the Gospel history has been gathered from his extant writings.<sup>1</sup> A careful comparison of Old Testament quotations shows that the apostolic fathers were in the habit of quoting loosely from memory.<sup>2</sup> Such is the case with Justin. Yet he clearly quotes the four Gospels, and says they were composed by the Apostles and their followers.

TATIAN, A. D. 150-170, a disciple of Justin, in his "Address to the Greeks," quotes repeatedly from the Gospel of John. He composed a Harmony of the four Gospels, which has been lost; but from allusions by other writers, we know that he had our four Gospels. His Harmony began with the words: "In the beginning was the Word."

Traces of John are found in the Shepherd of HERMAS, A. D. 130-140.

The Epistle of BARNABAS, A. D. 100-125, if not, indeed, as early as A. D. 75, introduces a

<sup>1</sup> See Sanday on *The Gospels in the Second Century*, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> The inconvenience of exact quotation is apparent when we remember that their copies were not divided into chapter and verse, nor the pages numbered. Some time and labor would be required to look up the desired passages.

quotation from Matthew, with the words, "it is written," — the usual formula among the Jews in making a citation from Scripture. It also has probable traces of Luke and John.

PAPIAS of Hierapolis, A. D. 120–140, was at some pains to gather from the old men of his time what they had heard the Apostles say of the teachings of Christ. This he committed to writing in a work in five books, under the title, "An Account of the Oracles of the Lord." This work is now lost; but Eusebius has preserved several extracts, in which Papias says, that "Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew tongue, and every one translated them as he was able;" and that Mark, the companion and secretary of Peter, wrote down accurately what Peter narrated of the words and actions of Christ, carefully avoiding any alteration or misrepresentation, though not writing his memoir in (chronological) order. These statements of Papias we will have occasion to take up again. Nothing is said as to the Gospel of John, but Eusebius tells us that he cited passages from the first Epistle of John. The fourth Gospel and the first Epistle of John, from similarity of language, form of thought and doctrine, are so mani-

festly the productions of the same mind, that whatever establishes the authenticity of one has justly been regarded as evidence for the other also. We have evidence, however, that Papias was also acquainted with John's Gospel. In an old preamble of a manuscript of the Gospels in the Vatican library, it is stated that "the Gospel of John was composed and delivered to the churches by John when he was still living — (circulated during his lifetime) — as Papias surnamed Hieropolitan, the beloved disciple of John, recounted in his five exoteric, that is his last five, books." It is inferred that the writer of this preamble had the work of Papias before him.<sup>1</sup>

POLYCARP, bishop of Smyrna, a disciple of John (martyr, A. D. 155, at an extreme old age), in his letter to the Philippian Christians, the date of which is usually placed about 116, quotes from Matthew and the first Epistle of John.

IGNATIUS, bishop of Antioch, who was carried in chains to Rome, and there thrown to

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<sup>1</sup> For further proof of Papias's acquaintance with the fourth Gospel, see Lange on *John*, Introduction, page 26; and Dr. Lightfoot's article in *Contemporary Review*, Oct., 1875.

wild beasts in the theatre, not later than the year 115, quotes from the Gospel of Matthew, uses language evidently derived from the Gospel of John, and certainly quotes the first Epistle of John.

CLEMENT OF ROME, a contemporary of the Apostles, was born as early as A. D. 30-40, and died about the year 100. All the books of the New Testament were written in his lifetime. In his letter to the church in Corinth, beside numerous quotations from other parts of Scripture, he uses language which corresponds with passages in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The Gospels are thus traced back step by step to the time of those who were taught directly by the Apostles. These writers did not attempt to prove the genuineness of the Gospels, because they were not questioned. Hence the incidental nature of their references. The evidence which they furnish is all the more valuable, because unintentional. It derives additional weight from the directness of the relation which they sustained to the apostolic age. Several of them were acquainted with the Apostle John, who survived till after the accession of Trajan, A. D. 98.



Others had opportunity, like Papias and Irænaeus, of conversing with those who had heard the Apostles. Their testimony is of value as a statement not only of their own opinion, but also of that of the community or religious society to which they belonged, and for a time as far back as the memory of each writer would extend.

Considering the small number of works that remain from the first and second centuries, we have an abundance of allusion to the Gospels. A few clear and unquestionable testimonies are sufficient. And it is safe to say that the Gospels are better supported than Greek and Latin classical works which have never been disputed.

4. The historical value of the Gospels was acknowledged by the early enemies of the Christian faith. Take, for instance, the teachers of Gnosticism, one of the earliest and most widespread of these opposing movements,—a strange mixture of heathen mythology, Greek philosophy, and Scripture truth. The greatest antagonism existed between these “heretical” teachers (as they were called) and the Christian Church; and if the Gospels, which furnished the church party with their

most effectual weapons, had been put in circulation by them after the controversy arose, the leaders of this hostile sect would certainly not have accepted them from this source. (Archbp. Thomson<sup>1</sup>.) But they referred to them as well-known histories, and sought in them some support for their peculiar views. "So well established," says Irenæus, "are our Gospels, that even teachers of error themselves bear testimony to them; even they rest their objections on the foundation of the Gospels."<sup>2</sup>

BASILIDES, who taught at Alexandria from A. D. 125 to 140, claimed to have received instruction from Glaucias, the secretary of Matthew, and must therefore have been born about the year A. D. 60-70. He seems certainly to have known and used the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. He wrote an extensive work on "the Gospel," which is lost. HERACLEON, his disciple, A. D. 150-160, made use of the same Gospels. He wrote a commentary on John. MARCION, A. D. 140, mutilated Luke's Gospel to suit his own purposes, and seems to have been acquainted with the

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<sup>1</sup> Smith's *Bible Dictionary*, article "Gospels."

<sup>2</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, III., 11, 7.

others also. VALENTINUS and his school, A. D. 140-160, evidently knew and used the Gospels. PTOLEMÆUS, A. D. 165-180, clearly refers to Matthew and John.<sup>1</sup>

The "Gnostic heresy" began to assume definite shape as early as the year 120, if not earlier; and as these teachers must have known the Gospels to have been accepted long before they began to use them, this carries the date of the Gospels back into the apostolic age.

5. Further evidence of their early origin is afforded by the apocryphal literature of the second and third centuries. These writings bear much the same relation to the books of the New Testament that counterfeit coin bears to genuine. They were put in circulation by those who sought to gain currency for their own views under the assumed garb of apostolic authority; or by those who sought, by fanciful inventions, to add something to the received history. While some of them contained extracts from the received Gospels, and remnants of early tradition, they were

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<sup>1</sup>About the same time, Celsus, a heathen philosopher, makes use of the Gospels as acknowledged histories.



made up for the most part of insipid and childish stories, and were early rejected as spurious imitations of the original Gospels. Few of them had any circulation outside of the limited circle in which they had their origin.

Now the oldest of these apocryphal writings can be shown to have been in existence as early as the year 150 A. D.; and as the originals, to gain the currency and acceptance which the counterfeits imply, must have been in existence some years before, this places the origin of our Gospels back at least as early as the time when John, the last surviving Apostle, was still living (A. D. 98).

6. Oral tradition is trustworthy within a reasonable lapse of time; and if the general acceptance of the Gospels in the second century rested upon nothing more than tradition, this could not be accounted for if untrue. Sometimes a considerable period may be covered by a few connected links of traditional testimony. Prof. Fisher<sup>1</sup> has illustrated this by the citation of Lord Campbell's statement that he had seen a person who had seen a

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<sup>1</sup> Essays on the *Supernatural Origin of Christianity*. New York, 1871, page 74.

witness of the execution of Charles I. in 1649—200 years before; and also by a reference to Plymouth Rock, the identity of which has been preserved by oral tradition for 250 years—though it has, within that time, been enclosed in a wharf, and the topography considerably changed. In 1741, when the wharf was about to be built, Elder Thomas Faunce, aged 91 years, came to visit the rock, and repeated what he had heard from the first settlers. His testimony was transmitted through Mrs. White, who died in 1810, aged 95 years, and Ephraim Spooner, who died in 1818, aged 83 years.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to see how the identity of the rock could have been lost, because old and young were existing there together in the same community, and any statement contrary to the received tradition would certainly have called forth an emphatic protest.

Many persons can relate what they heard from their grandfathers in regard to events which occurred in their younger days. Very similar is the case with those who lived in the first half of the second century—one generation after John. Justin, Quadratus, Aristides,

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher: *Supernatural Origin of Christianity*, page 74.

Hermas, and many others who helped to shape opinion in this period, must have had opportunities of conversing with those who had heard the Apostles. Polycarp was the disciple of John, and Irenæus, in his youth, had listened to the instruction of Polycarp. He had also, for a time, been co-pastor with Pothinus, who was born about the year 88, and whose memory, therefore, must have extended back to the year 100. John's old age was spent in Asia Minor, where personal recollections of his teaching must have survived for many years. And here too Polycrates was born about the year 125, of a family which had furnished seven bishops to the church. (Fisher.) It is hard to see how these men, on the threshold of the apostolic age, could be mistaken in regard to the apostolic origin of books so well known and widely circulated. In the case of minor books of the New Testament, which at first circulated slowly, and did not, for some time, become generally known, there might be occasional hesitation or mistake. But all the evidence goes to show that the four Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles of Paul, the first Epistle of John, and the first Epistle of Peter, were

accepted as undisputed books from the beginning.

In addition to all this, the churches, as Justin tells us, were accustomed to hear the writings of the Apostles (with the Prophets) read in their assemblies on the first day of each week. As the worship of the church was copied from that of the synagogue, there is every reason to believe that this practice had come down from the earliest times. And the tradition as to the authorship and identity of their sacred books would thus be kept fresh in the memory of Christian people.

The men of that day were not all persons of such unquestioning credulity as some would have us believe. Many of them were skilled in Greek philosophy and learning before they embraced Christianity,—men of inquiring and discriminating habit of mind. Their caution in accepting what claimed to be apostolic writings is evident from their rejection of rival Gospels which bore the names of Apostles; and also from the fact that it was only after mature deliberation that they accepted some of the minor (and for this reason less known) books of the New Testament.

7. But the matter of tradition has another

bearing, viz., that if the Gospels were composed at a time later than has been usually claimed, they still were written early enough to be truly historical, since even in this case they would have a basis of recent tradition.

The Christian Church was well fitted for transmitting unchanged all essential articles of her belief,<sup>1</sup>—because

(1.) It was a corporate body — an organized society, in which old and young were existing side by side, furnishing a continuous unbroken stream of traditional teaching from the apostolic age to later times.

(2.) The traditionary education of the Jewish nation had reached a high degree of perfection. Long-continued habit had prepared them for orally transmitting the most important instruction without change.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Row on *The Supernatural in the New Testament*. London, 1875, pp. 481-492.

<sup>2</sup> Writing in regard to Dr. Schliemann's discoveries, and the tradition which Pausanias recorded as preserved in his time at Mycenæ, M. D. Conway says, in one of his public letters, "He [Schliemann] knew enough of the superstitious fidelity with which many an event has been transmitted orally from father to son, in German villages, through centuries, to know that the human mind will preserve a fact as long as a rock its fossil."



(3.) The new religion, besides, was not so much the adherence to certain doctrines as it was devotion to a Leader — allegiance to a Person. Would they not fondly cherish the memory of his gracious words and mighty deeds? Isolated facts of history, in which they had no special personal interest, might soon be lost, but how could those things perish which were their very life!

(4.) Nor is this all. These Christian people felt it to be their mission to convert the whole world to their faith. How could they do this but by recounting to others what they knew of Christ — his life and teaching? How else persuade the Jews that in Him the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled?

Under all these circumstances, how could any sudden or radical change in the church's belief be introduced? Would not anything new be recognized as new?<sup>1</sup> If these Gospels (supposing them to be productions of a later date) presented a view different from that preserved by the church, or by any part of it, why no word of protest when they were made public? or why no word of surprise that they had so long escaped notice?

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher: *Supernat. Origin of Christianity*, page 76.

An extract from the epistle of Irenæus to Florinus,<sup>1</sup> whom he sought to reclaim from heresy, may here be given, as throwing some light on the care exercised in these matters.

“I can tell even the spot in which the blessed Polycarp sat and conversed . . . . and the conversations which he held with the multitude; and how he related his familiar intercourse with John and the rest who had seen the Lord, and how he rehearsed their sayings, and what things they were which he had heard from them with regard to the Lord and his miracles and teaching. All these things Polycarp related in harmony with the writings, as having received them from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life. These sayings, then, was I in the habit of eagerly hearing, through the mercy given me by God, storing them up, not on paper, but in my heart.”

Irenæus says in another place,<sup>2</sup> “and Polycarp, who was not only instructed by Apostles, and had intercourse with many who had seen

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<sup>1</sup> Preserved by Eusebius: *Hist. Eccl.*, V.; 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, III.; 3. These translations are from Dr. Donaldson on *The Apostolical Fathers*. London, 1874.

Christ, but was also appointed for Asia, by Apostles, a bishop in the church that is in Smyrna, . . . always taught these things, which also he learned from the Apostles, which also he gave to the church, and which alone are true. To these doctrines testimony is also borne by all the churches throughout Asia."

Even as late as the time of Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian (A. D. 190-210) tradition could be confidently appealed to.<sup>1</sup> The former speaks of his teachers, one in Greece, one in Magna Græcia, one in Syria, one in Egypt, one in Assyria, one in Palestine, to whom the doctrine of the Apostles had been handed down from father to son. Tertullian boldly claims on his side, the tradition of the apostolic churches, and in one passage, by a rhetorical figure, sends his readers to the churches of Corinth, Philippi, etc., for authentic copies of Paul's Epistles.

The Christian Church, as has been pointed out, had the best facilities for preserving a correct traditional account of its Founder and had the strongest inducements to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> See Sanday on *The Gospels in the Second Century*. London, 1876, p. 327.



But the church was not dependent upon oral tradition alone. Surely, enterprising men there would be among the first disciples who would commit to writing some account of Christ's parables, and the stirring events of his life, for the benefit of those who were to come after. This antecedent probability of written documents rises to certainty when we read the opening sentence of the third Gospel, where we are told that there were *many* (uninspired) narratives in circulation before Luke wrote his more complete history.

Even if the first three Gospels had been composed as late as 90-115 A. D. (which is the latest date that can be assigned by unbelieving criticism), the writers, we conclude, were still within reach of trustworthy oral and written tradition. And though a few errors in the details might, in this case, have crept into the traditional account, still, it is certain that the main facts could not have been lost or covered up by fictitious inventions. Extended discourses would be harder to preserve orally than the connecting narrative of events. Now the internal structure of the discourses in the first three Gospels shows that they have not suffered materially in this way. Critical

scholars who would be suspected of no bias in favor of Christianity, believe that in these three Gospels we have the veritable sayings of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> If the discourses have survived, much more than may we believe that the connecting narrative portion of the history has remained essentially unchanged.<sup>2</sup>

Such a low historical value as this is not to be placed on the Gospels by any means, as we have seen; but if it were, they would still be sufficiently trustworthy for the purposes of our argument. This and the preceding sec-

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<sup>1</sup> "And whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left, an unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his teaching. Who among his disciples, or among the proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospel? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncracies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that the good which was in them was all derived, as they all profess that it was derived, from the higher source." John Stuart Mill: *Three Essays on Religion*.

<sup>2</sup> On the whole subject of tradition, see Row on *The Supernatural in the New Testament*, pp. 481-492.

tion are meant to show (reversing the order) (1) that the early church had the best facilities for preserving a correct traditional account of its Founder; and if the Gospels were not contemporary records, they still were written early enough to have preserved the main facts of the life of Jesus and his most important sayings unchanged: (2) that the churches in the second century could not be mistaken in regard to the apostolic origin of the Gospels, and therefore their testimony on this point is to be relied on.

8. In all parts of the Roman world from Arabia to Gaul, the testimony of antiquity was the same. This would not have been the case, if tradition had been introducing new elements from time to time. The current views in regard to Jesus and the Gospels would have been continually changing, and would have become different in widely separated parts of the world. Now the old Latin version in North Africa (A. D. 150-160), the Syriac version in the extreme East (A. D. 150-175), and the statements of writers in Asia Minor, Italy, Gaul, Carthage, Egypt, and Syria show that the popular belief in regard to the Gospels was settled and uniform.

Means of intercourse in those days were limited; there could be no concerted action, as no general council had been held; there were no public mails; and the progress of opinion was comparatively slow. It is evident, therefore, that the uniformity of opinion had long been established.

As already mentioned, the Apostle John lived long after the other Apostles were dead, and as late as the year 98. He thus forms a connecting link between the apostolic age, properly speaking, and the second century, when literature becomes more abundant. Some twenty-five years of his old age he spent in Ephesus and the adjoining region<sup>1</sup>. During this time many public and private Christians of Asia Minor must have had frequent communication with him, and received from him accurate information in regard to those things which lay at the foundation of their most precious hopes. So marked and permanent was his influence on this circle of believers, that he has been spoken of as the

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<sup>1</sup> This rests upon the statements of Polycrates, Apollonius, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Jerome, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.

founder of a school.<sup>1</sup> If therefore the traditional account of Jesus and the Gospels in other parts of the world had not been correct, we would find a difference here in Asia Minor, where John's influence was most felt. But it is found the same here as elsewhere.

9. But this is not all. The sudden origin and rapid spread of Christianity must be accounted for. As a matter of history, nothing of the kind was known prior to the year 25 A. D. Before the year 40, it was in vigorous existence and gradually extending. The success of the movement was accomplished in the face of great obstacles and bitter opposition. Refined heathenism was supported by learning, wealth, political power, social influence, superstition, and, above all, the natural indifference of the human heart to that which imposes restraint and self-denial. Those who espoused the new religion were subjected to cruel torture and imprisonment; they were beheaded or burned at the stake; they were skinned alive or made to fight with wild beasts in the theatre! Yet in the midst of

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<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Lightfoot's article in *Contemporary Review*, Feb., 1876.



all this persecution the Christian religion grew and gathered strength, until, at the end of two and a half centuries, it ascended Cæsar's throne and ruled the world. Such zeal, such devotion, such patient endurance, such willingness to die rather than prove false, such peaceful martyrdom, the world had not seen before. There is no nobler chapter in history. Now what started this movement? What was the cause of this faith, this enthusiasm, this self-sacrifice? It could only have been inspired by some such personage as we find in the Gospels,—one who was not only good and great, but who was also believed to be supernatural.<sup>1</sup>

10. The theory of the late composition of the Gospels has been advanced to account for the miraculous in the life of Christ, which is alleged to have been the result of imperfectly transmitted tradition. Such a change in the traditional account could be only a very gradual growth; and this would, of course, require considerable time. If therefore the chief of these supernatural occurrences, or

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<sup>1</sup> Blauvett's articles in *Scribner's Monthly*, and Row on *The Supernatural in the New Testament*.

any one of them, be shown, from sources outside of the Gospels, to have been generally believed while the Apostles were living, this theory falls to the ground.

We turn first to the EPISTLES OF PAUL. The books of the New Testament, be it remembered, were distinct productions, and at first were circulated as separate volumes. It is only for the sake of convenience that they are now bound together. *This should be distinctly borne in mind, if we would understand the bearing of these separate books on each other.*

The Epistles of Paul are among the best authenticated writings of any age. They were sent forth under his own name, and have been read and quoted as authority in every century since his day. The objections which are now urged against some of them seem so trivial as scarcely to deserve serious consideration. For instance: because there is much of abstract reasoning in the Epistle to the Romans, and because special prominence is given, in the Epistle to the Galatians, to the conflict between the Jewish and Gentile elements in the Christian Church, therefore the Epistles to the Thessalonians are of



doubtful authorship, because nothing of the same kind is found in them! Is Paul not to be allowed the privilege, like others, of adapting his letters to the different circumstances of those to whom he writes? Because Leibnitz is known as a writer on philosophy, are we to discard a letter bearing his signature, merely because it is taken up with questions of state or topics of the time? If the structure of Paul's Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim., 2 Tim., Titus) presents a greater contrast with his early Epistles, it is not more than might be looked for in one of his versatility, and surely not more than is found in the works of many a modern writer. If we admit the arbitrary and artificial rules of criticism which some would apply to the books of the New Testament, we could, by the same rules, disprove any fact of history. Mere theories and assumptions are of no weight in the face of direct and positive evidence. No one thinks of questioning the works of Horace or Cicero; and if these are received as genuine, so must the Epistles of the great Apostle be received, for they rest on the same kind of evidence, and as much of it.

If, however, we confine our attention to

those of the Epistles of Paul which unbelieving critics accept as genuine, it will be enough for our present purpose. We have left, then, four at least,<sup>1</sup> Romans, 1 Corinth., 2 Corinth., Galatians. From these we learn that the Apostles and all the adherents of the new religion firmly believed that Jesus had risen from the dead; that this belief had prevailed from the beginning, and was the very foundation on which the church was built. (Rom. i. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 4-8.)

Paul was able not only to recount the appearances of Christ after his resurrection to Peter and James, to the other Apostles and to himself, but could confidently appeal to more than 250 witnesses then living (about the year 56); and this he could do in the presence of a party in the church who were hostile to him, and would not be slow to expose him if he were not believed to be correct. We might go further and say that this belief could not have gained such a hold on the minds of the disciples unless there was

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<sup>1</sup> Renan acknowledges seven, viz., Romans, 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Gal., Phil., 1 Thes., 2 Thes., as surely genuine, and Col. and Philemon as probably genuine—nine in all.

some foundation for it; but this will be considered in another place. It is enough for the present to observe that this was the universal faith of the church from the beginning, a faith for which they were willing to suffer the loss of all things—even life itself. The testimony of Paul is of special value on these points for the reason that he was thoroughly acquainted with the movement almost from its very inception, and his adherence was rendered reluctantly and only on the most overwhelming conviction.

From the same sources we also learn that Paul, whose sincerity cannot be questioned, claimed for himself the power of working miracles, and acknowledged the same gift in others. (2 Cor. xii. 12; Rom. xv. 18, 19; Gal. iii. 5; 1 Cor. xii. 8–10.) Gifts of healing, of prophecy, of speaking in unknown languages, etc., were matters of common observation and belief. And if these belonged to the members, much more must they have been accorded to Him who was regarded as the Divine Head of the church.<sup>1</sup> The Epistles of

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<sup>1</sup> See Row on *The Supernatural in the New Testament*, pp. 408–418, and Sanday on *The Gospels in the Second Century*, p. 11.

Paul, from beginning to end, imply the general belief in the supernatural character of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels.

But these are not all. The FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER (supported by the Second Epistle of Peter, by Clement of Rome, A. D. 95; Polycarp, A. D. 116; and Papias, A. D. 120-140), the APOCALYPSE OF JOHN (supported by Papias and Justin Martyr), and the EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS (written while the temple was still standing,—Heb. xiii. 10,—and Timothy still alive, xiii. 23, and quoted by Clement of Rome), are accepted by sceptical critics as authentic documents of the apostolic age. And they bear like testimony to the supernatural character of Jesus, and especially his resurrection, as universally and devoutly accepted by the primitive church. This belief could not, therefore, have been the accumulated growth of several generations; and the theory which is based on this false assumption is worthless.

II. Between the Epistles of Paul and the BOOK OF ACTS there are many undesigned coincidences, such as would be unaccountable if the last named were a forgery of the second

century.<sup>1</sup> The numerous geographical and historical allusions in this book are strikingly corroborated by Greek and Latin classical authors. It was accepted by the early church, as is shown by the use made of it by writers in the second century, and by the fact that it has a place in the list of undisputed books and in the ancient manuscripts and versions.

That a work covering such an important part of history (the development of the Christian Church from Jerusalem, the Jewish capital, to Rome, the political metropolis of the world) should be written in the second century, for the purpose of reconciling the hostile Pauline and Petrine parties,<sup>2</sup> (a groundless assumption,) without making a single quotation from the Epistles of Paul, is next to a moral impossibility. If Paul must be honored in order to conciliate his followers, what better material could be used than is found in his own Epistles? To what unreasonable shifts we must be driven when we reject the obvious facts of history!

The author of *The Acts* traces Paul's life

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<sup>1</sup> See Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete refutation of this theory, see Fisher, *Supernatural Origin of Christianity*, Essay IV.



with much detail up to the time of his imprisonment at Rome, and then abruptly closes the history without making any reference to his death. This is evidence that the book was completed and given to the world while Paul was still living.

And if the Book of Acts is authentic, so is the THIRD GOSPEL. They are certainly the productions of the same author, as is shown by the use in both books of many Greek words and expressions which are used by no other writer. Some of these peculiarities are very striking, and the evidence which they furnish is unmistakable. These two books thus mutually support each other. And again, as there was a strong disposition to fix on some great name for the authorship of books that were circulating anonymously,<sup>1</sup> the uniform tradition of early Christendom ascribing the authorship of these two highly important works to *one so obscure and otherwise unknown*, cannot be accounted for, if untrue.

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<sup>1</sup> The Gospels, like all the other historical books of Scripture, were anonymous. Their present titles, though correct, were not prefixed by the writers, but by copyists and others, to distinguish them, and for convenience of reference.

The same result is reached by a comparison of several passages of the New Testament.

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word ; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.” Luke i. 1-4.

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Acts i. 1.

“Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.” Col. iv. 14.

“There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus ; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-laborers.” Philemon, verses 23 and 24.

“Only Luke is with me.” 2 Tim. iv. 11.

These passages, in connection with Acts xvi. 10, and others in which the writer uses



the pronouns "we" or "us,"<sup>1</sup> show that the third Gospel and the Acts were written by the same person, and point to Luke, the companion of Paul, as the author.<sup>2</sup>

The Book of Acts was evidently composed, or at least completed, during Paul's two years' imprisonment at Rome, A. D. 61-63, in the leisure that was thus afforded to Luke, his companion; and Luke's Gospel probably during Paul's former imprisonment at Cæsarea, A. D. 58-60. In his introduction (Luke i. 1-4) he tells us that his narrative is based, more or less directly, upon the observation of eye-witnesses, and, as we fairly infer, that his ample material is worked up with great

<sup>1</sup> Compared with Acts xv. 40; xvi. 29; xvii. 1, 14; xx. 4, 5; showing that the first personal pronoun does not apply to Silas or Timothy.

<sup>2</sup> The four introductory verses of Luke's Gospel are written in his own native Greek style. So is the last half of the Acts, in which he gives the result of his own personal observation; while the intermediate portions of both narratives have a strong Hebraic coloring, showing that his knowledge of the Gospel and the events recorded in the first half of the Acts, came to him from Jewish sources. This is another confirmation of Luke's authorship.—*Godet*.

care. Here then we have a contemporaneous document of the highest historical value.

12. The authorship of the third Gospel being satisfactorily determined, let us examine at more length the testimony of Papias, already alluded to, in favor of Mark's Gospel. In one of the extracts which remain from his work, he tells us, in substance, on the authority of John the presbyter, that Mark, the companion and secretary of Peter, wrote down accurately what Peter narrated of the words and actions of Christ, carefully avoiding any alteration or misrepresentation, though not writing his memoir in (chronological) order.

Can this evidence for Mark's Gospel be set aside by unsupported conjectures? If ours is not the same "Mark," what became of the original? Could one be withdrawn from before the public and another substituted, and no trace of the change be left? And what motive could induce such a change? (Fisher.) If we were to affirm that the history of Thucydides was suppressed and that the work now bearing his name is spurious, what would be thought of such an idea? (Tregelles: *Hist. Evidences.*)

The ground of the objection is the statement of Papias's informant that Mark did not write his history in chronological order; whereas, it is found that Mark's Gospel follows the order of time as closely as the others, if not more so. But it should be borne in mind that the statement to the contrary is only the opinion of a man who lays no claim to infallibility. If, as is probable, he belonged to the school of the Apostle John, his familiarity with the fourth Gospel may have led him to infer that Mark's narrative in comparison with this, was not so strictly chronological.

The friendship between Peter and Mark is corroborated by a sentence dropped by another writer apparently without any design. When Peter was liberated from prison, he bent his steps, Luke tells us, to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark (Acts xii. 12). Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius, and Jerome also tell us that Mark was the secretary of Peter. (See also 1 Peter v. 13.)

The testimony of Papias is confirmed by the internal structure of the book itself. In those scenes of which Peter was an eye-

witness, we find a fulness of detail which accords with the statement that the Gospel of Mark is based mainly upon the personal recollections of Peter. And to his credit be it said, that while some things which reflect honor on him are here omitted, the things of an opposite character are faithfully narrated without a word of palliation.

13. Through Eusebius we also have the statement of Papias that "Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew (Aramaic) tongue, and every one translated them as he was able." There seems little ground for any difference of opinion as to what was the original language of Matthew's Gospel. All the early writers, who say anything on the subject, tell us that it was written in Hebrew; and several of these were instructed by those who were taught by the Apostles. Nothing would be more natural than that a Gospel written by Matthew for his countrymen should be written in their own language, and afterwards be translated into Greek, the world-language, by Matthew himself, or some other competent authority. Josephus, we know, wrote his history first in Hebrew and afterwards translated it into Greek, for a wider

circle of readers. The Greek has survived and the Hebrew been lost. It would not be foreign to the state of things which existed in the primitive church, if one person should be inspired to write a Gospel for one class of readers, and another person be inspired to translate or recast it for another class. (1 Cor. xiv. 26, 27.) Or, if earlier documents (Luke i. 1) were made use of in the composition of it, this would be no disparagement to its inspiration, any more than in the case of the Books of Kings and Chronicles, which were compiled from other works, such as "The Book of Gad the Seer," "The Book of the Acts of Solomon," etc.,<sup>1</sup> and were certainly recognized as inspired books by our Lord and his Apostles.<sup>2</sup> And this would ac-

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<sup>1</sup> See Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*, articles "Kings," "Chronicles."

<sup>2</sup> Take an illustration from the Old Testament. The first copy of Jeremiah's prophecies was destroyed by the angry king. (Jer. xxxvi.) Afterwards, at the Lord's command, the book was again written, with the addition of "many like words." Both copies were inspired, yet one was an enlargement of the other. As a further illustration, it may be mentioned that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* continued to grow on his hands after the first edition.

count for some peculiarities of construction in this Gospel, notably the fact that the writer makes his own quotations of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew text, while in repeating a quotation made by some one else, whom he represents as speaking, it is almost invariably from the Septuagint version.

Some think that Matthew's work only included the extended discourses. If this were so, could not this have been translated and enlarged<sup>2</sup> into a more complete history by one of those many men who were the vehicles of inspiration,—whose names are lost to fame? (Acts xx. 23; 1 Cor. xiv.)

Whatever may be the fact in regard to the exact manner in which this Gospel was composed, the evidence, external and internal, goes to show that it was in circulation, in its present Greek form, before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. (See the next chapter.) Papias, a Greek, and probably unacquainted with Hebrew, mentions the necessity of every one translating Matthew's Hebrew Gospel as something already past (the aorist tense), which seems to imply that his Gospel was then in circulation in a language better understood. (So Meyer and Westcott.) Irenæus



and others who make the same statement in regard to the Hebrew original, at the same time treat the Greek text as the authentic work of the Apostle.<sup>1</sup>

The general acceptance of this Gospel immediately after the time of the Apostles can only be satisfactorily accounted for on the ground that it was handed down with apostolic sanction. It has, therefore, in its present Greek form, at least the force of an authorized version. It presents a similarity of style and a unity of plan throughout such as belong to an original composition or a faithful translation. As the Hebrew is no longer extant, the present Greek text may be accepted by us without hesitation as the authentic text. To us it is now practically the original. It has always borne the name of Matthew; and the surest indications as to date point to the year 60-65. To this conclusion rationalistic criticism itself has at length returned as the result of its own independent investigations.<sup>2</sup>

The authorship of the fourth Gospel will

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<sup>1</sup>Westcott's *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*. London, 1872, pp. 223-225.

<sup>2</sup>Godet's *Studies on the New Testament*. London, 1876, p. 22.



more properly be considered in another place.

14. A word may here be necessary on the subject of textual criticism as applied to the New Testament, in order (1) to indicate the method by which it is shown that the original text has been preserved without material alteration; and (2) to present another argument for the early composition of the Gospels.

The books of the New Testament, and all ancient writings which had to be copied by hand, suffered many slight verbal changes, in the course of centuries, through the carelessness of copyists, or their well meant but culpable efforts to improve the wording, now and then, by substituting a smoother form of expression for one less familiar, or by the insertion of explanatory words.

The whole number of various readings which may be gathered from the numerous manuscripts of the New Testament, is, of course, quite large. But most of these are very slight,—such as different methods of spelling the same word, change in the order of the words, alterations of tense, number, or case. Many of these make no difference

in the meaning, and would not appear in a translation. In some cases, however, the alteration is of more importance. But even these are not such as to affect any essential fact or doctrine of Christianity. If we were shut up to the text of the most imperfect copy in existence, no matter either of faith or duty would be imperilled.<sup>1</sup> The important truth remains to be stated, that from the very ample material at hand, scholars have been able to arrive with certainty at the true reading in all but comparatively few cases. And in these exceptional cases it is hoped a solution may soon be arrived at, from the additional light which continued investigation may furnish.

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<sup>1</sup> "The worst manuscript extant would not pervert one article of our faith, or destroy one moral precept."  
—*Dr. T. H. Horne.*

"No one doctrine of religion is changed, not one precept is taken away, not one important fact is altered, by the whole of the various readings collectively taken."—*Moses Stuart.*

"The fact should be recognized, that we have the means of presenting the text of the Greek New Testament in a purer form than is attainable in the case of any ancient Greek or Latin author whose writings have come down to us."—*Rev. Ezra Abbot, D.D., LL.D.; letter to Rev. E. W. Rice, Cambridge, 21 May, 1878.*

The material for the correction of the text may be briefly stated as follows: (1) Greek manuscripts to the number of more than 1600, ranging in date from the fourth to the fifteenth century. Some of these contain the entire New Testament; some only a single book; while others are mere fragments, chiefly valuable as sample pages of sumptuous copies which have perished. (2) The early versions, to wit, two Latin, four Syriac, the Coptic (Lower Egypt), Sahidic (Upper Egypt), Gothic, Armenian, Ethiopic (Abysinia). These, of course, represent the still older Greek copies from which they were translated, ranging in date from the first to the sixth century. (3) Quotations by early writers. All of the New Testament, except a very few verses, could be recovered from the writings of the first three centuries, two-thirds of it being found in the extant works of Origen alone.<sup>1</sup>

Now, so far as relates to the Gospels, Mr. Sanday<sup>2</sup> has shown elaborately that in the

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent outline of New Testament criticism is presented in *The Words of the New Testament, altered by transmission and ascertained by criticism*. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospels in the Second Century*.

second century—even as early as the time of Justin Martyr, (A. D. 146)—there were such variations in the text as could only have arisen in the lapse of considerable time. And thus, by another line of argument, the date of the Gospels is carried back into the first century. To those familiar with the subject of textual criticism, Mr. Sanday's argument is one of great force.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

IN moral elevation and spiritual enlightenment, the Gospels and other New Testament books are immeasurably in advance of all the other writings of the age in which they appeared. Compare the best works of the ancient philosophers and poets, and even the uninspired Christian fathers. We are sensible of having passed into another atmosphere when we leave the writings of the Apostles for those of the next age.

2. The four Gospels are the work of as many different men,<sup>1</sup> written in different parts

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<sup>1</sup> Their independence of each other is shown by their marked differences; for example, between the discourses recorded by John and those by the other three; between the genealogies in Luke and Matthew. Matthew makes forty three direct citations, in his own person, from the Old Testament; Luke nineteen; Mark but one. Mark omits one whole year of Christ's ministry. His Gospel, though the shortest, has more

of the world, in some measure with different designs, and for distinct classes of readers. Yet they all picture the same Jesus. His character is the same in all. And this does not follow from any categorical statement of his virtues. The Evangelists do not tell us in so many words that he was gentle and brave and wise. These things are to be inferred from what he says and does.

So with Peter. In all the Gospel narratives we have the same character presented — with its strange combination of strength and weakness; frank, impulsive, outspoken, bold — yet rash and sometimes timid.

That four independent histories<sup>1</sup> should harmonize in this way, is inexplicable on

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Hebraic forms and coloring than all the others combined. They each have striking peculiarities in the use of Greek words and expressions. The similarity of parallel passages in the first three Gospels probably arises from the familiarity of the writers with the oral Gospel which formed the basis of apostolic teaching. It is doubtful whether they had seen each other's Gospels.

<sup>1</sup>It is scarcely proper to speak of the Gospels as Biographies. Westcott suggests that they are not strictly histories of the life of Christ, but histories of man's redemption.



any other supposition than that they are each a faithful record of facts.

3. These writers have recorded their own blunders and weaknesses and slowness to understand the true nature of Christ's mission. Would partisan fanatics have done so? They have given us simple, straightforward narrations of facts, without a particle of national prejudice, without a word of comment or eulogy,—all ideas of self seemingly lost in the contemplation of the character before them. Could forgers have done this?

4. The four narratives supplement each other. An obscure passage or context in one Gospel is sometimes cleared up by the mention of one or two additional particulars in another. In one Gospel we may have a certain utterance or discourse, while it may be only when we turn to another of the Gospels that we ascertain what was the occurrence that called it forth. The fact that these four histories supplement each other must be taken in connection with the other fact that they are entirely independent.

5. The Gospels abound in minute references to times and places and persons. The domestic life and topography of Galilee are



vividly before us.<sup>1</sup> The fragmentary allusions to traits of character (for example, in Herod, Annas, and Pilate) are those which are given with more detail by Jewish, Roman, or Greek authors. Had the Gospels been forgeries of the second century, the attempt at such minute circumstantiality would surely have laid them open to detection.

6. There are many *undesigned* coincidences. Take a few examples. It is natural to suppose that the Apostle John would cherish a fond recollection of his first acquaintance with Jesus; and those striking words of the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God," must have made a lasting impression on his mind. Now we find that John calls Jesus a Lamb more than twenty times in his writings (see especially the Apocalypse); and he is the only New Testament writer who uses this title, unless we except Peter in one instance.

Surrounding objects (for example, the fields white for the harvest) often furnished Jesus the illustrations for his public teaching. The

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<sup>1</sup>Row on *The Supernat. in the New Testament*. Even in modern times, Renan finds Palestine, with its climate, soil, customs, and topography, "a fifth Gospel."

mention of a nobleman travelling into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return would be unintelligible to the disciples, had it not been that Archelaus and Antipas had both journeyed to Rome for this purpose. And we find, on examination, that it was just after Christ's departure from Jericho that he addresses this parable to the disciples. From sources outside of the Gospels we learn that the palace built by Archelaus was the most conspicuous and attractive object in the town. This of course suggested the parable. How natural these unsuspected coincidences if the Gospel is true history! How unaccountable if it is fiction!<sup>1</sup>

The first three Evangelists mention that when the soldiers and officers came to arrest Jesus, one of his disciples drew a sword and struck a servant of the high-priest; but they withhold the disciple's name. It might have caused him trouble to have this publicly mentioned while the parties were living. But John, who writes after they were dead, tells us that it was Peter.

Minute coincidences of this kind, which do not appear on the surface, but are brought out

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<sup>1</sup> Farrar: *Life of Christ*, vol. ii., p. 188, note.

only by searching scrutiny, are marks of historical truthfulness, because they are clearly *undesigned*. These incidental confirmations are abundant.

7. The picture of Christ's childhood, which we have in the Gospels, is natural and perfect. Little is told us, it is true, of his childhood and youth; but what we have forms a fitting introduction to the life of his maturer years. How different from the silly fancies in which the apocryphal gospels have arrayed the childhood of Jesus. They ascribe a multitude of miracles to him in his boyhood<sup>1</sup>—mere aimless displays of power. These childish and almost blasphemous productions show what our Gospels would have been if they had been written in the second century.<sup>2</sup>

8. The Evangelists do not ascribe a single miracle to John the Baptist. (John x. 41, 42.) "This should be noted as a most powerful argument of the Gospel truthfulness. If, as the schools of modern rationalists argue, the

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<sup>1</sup> John tells us that the marriage at Cana was the occasion of the first miracle.

<sup>2</sup> See Bushnell on *The Character of Jesus*, pp. 15-18, N. Y., 1867; and Farrar's *Life of Christ*, vol. i., pp. 13 and 59.

miracles be mere myths woven into a circle of imaginative legends devised to glorify the Founder of Christianity, why was no miracle attributed to St. John? Not certainly from any deficient sense of his greatness, nor from any disinclination to accept miraculous evidence. Surely, if it were so easy and so natural, as has been assumed, to weave a garland of myth and miracle round the brow of a great teacher, John was conspicuously worthy of such an honor. Why then? Because 'John did no miracle,' and because the Evangelists speak the words of soberness and truth."<sup>1</sup>

9. After the circulation of Paul's Epistles, "Christ" became the common name of our Saviour; while in the Gospels we find his habitual designation is "Jesus" (the name by which his friends and followers addressed him); "Christ" or "the Christ" (*i. e.* the Messiah) being rather his *official title*. Does not this point to an early composition of these memoirs?

10. Christ's prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world furnish important evidence. That these are not fictitious inventions suggested by the events

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<sup>1</sup> Farrar: *Life of Christ*, vol. i., p. 114.

themselves, is shown by their structure and by several disconnected circumstances.

(1.) Of the fifty verses which make up the series of prophecies as recorded in Matthew, only four give a description of the scenes of bloodshed and desolation, and this only in the most general terms, while much the greater number are occupied with that which the disciples needed most to know,—the *signs* or premonitions of those unprecedented calamities, together with admonitions to watchfulness and duty. Surely the proportion would have been different if the would-be prophecy had been written after the events. The writer would naturally have pictured the scenes of carnage and destruction with more distinctness and detail.<sup>1</sup>

(2.) The subjects of the prophecy are so interwoven as to convey the impression that the writer himself understood that the destruction of Jerusalem, the second coming of Christ, and the end of the world were to occur in immediate connection with each other, and within the lifetime of persons then living.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barrows : *Companion to the Bible*. Am. Tr. Society.

<sup>2</sup> Destruction of Jerusalem and the temple foretold, Matt. xxiv. 1-28. End of the world, verses 29-31.



This is so apparently the case that Gibbon and others have made it the object of their satire. Very well then: we have here the best evidence that the Gospel of Matthew, in its present form, was committed to writing before the destruction of Jerusalem. If it had been written afterwards by a forger, it is fair to suppose that he would have inserted some clause to explain the apparent discrepancy.<sup>1</sup> But there stands the bald statement: "This generation shall not pass away until all these things be fulfilled."<sup>2</sup> Would a writer record a fabricated prophecy in this shape, without a modifying expression, sixty years after the words were said to have been spoken — the men of that generation dead; Jerusalem for twenty years in ruins; and the end of the world not yet come?

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"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened," "the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven."

<sup>1</sup> Fisher: *Supernat. Origin of Christianity*, p. 170.

The generic method of interpretation — by which is meant that a given prophecy may have several similar fulfilments — offers a sufficient explanation. That is, this prophecy as a whole was to be fulfilled, 1st, in the destruction of Jerusalem; 2d, in the end of the world.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiv. 34. As to the meaning of "genea," see Alexander on *Mark*, p. 362.

(3.) There was a wide-spread belief on the part of primitive Christians that the second advent of Christ and the end of the world were to occur in their day.

(4.) If, as many interpreters believe, the parenthetic clause, "let him that readeth understand," (Matt. xxiv. 15), are not the words of Jesus, but are inserted by the historian to point out the signal for precipitate flight, it is quite intelligible if written before the event, but has no meaning if written afterwards. It of course implies something to be read, and refers to those who would read this Gospel. But if they are the words of Jesus, they refer to the reader of Daniel's prophecy.

(5.) More than a million Jews perished at the siege of Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> — but no Christians. The historian Eusebius tells us that they fled to the little town of Pella among the mountains on the east of Jordan, and so escaped the unparalleled horrors of that siege. Was it because they heeded the warning recorded in Matt. xxiv. 16, "then let them that are in Judea flee into the mountains"?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Josephus. His *Jewish War* is a striking commentary on the words of our Lord.

<sup>2</sup> Tradition says it was because of a vision of the



11. The Hellenistic dialect in which the Gospels are written, and the manifest Judaic training of the writers, is in accordance with the received view as to their origin.

12. John's Gospel, the last written of the four, has unjustly been the object of attack on account of the marked difference between it and the other three. These differences can be accounted for, and are themselves proof of genuineness. For, if a forgery of the second century, why should it have been so differently constructed? What motive would a forger have for leaving the beaten track, and introducing new features, which would cause his work to be suspected? And how could a composition so different secure acceptance unless known beyond doubt to be the work of an Apostle?

Though John dwells on that part of our Lord's ministry which was spent in Judea, he clearly implies the Galilean ministry. (John vii. 3, 4.) On the other hand, the first three Evangelists, who dwell on that part of our Lord's ministry which was spent in Galilee, as clearly imply his Judean ministry. ("O

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Apostle John. But this solution would be equally fatal to the views of antisupernaturalists.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . . how often would I have gathered thy children," etc. Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xiii. 34.) John's Gospel is in a measure supplementary, and therefore he omits the sermon on the mount, the temptation, the transfiguration, etc., and gives much that the other Evangelists omit.

If the discourses of Jesus as recorded by John are higher and more spiritual, this is because he was fitted by his temperament and his more familiar friendship to gain a truer insight into the higher spiritual nature of Jesus, and consequently better able to grasp and to transmit his more elevated discourses. Yet the other Evangelists are not without some detached sayings in the same strain. (For example, Matt. xi. 25-27.) Very similar is the case of Socrates and his instructions as represented by his different disciples.<sup>1</sup>

(1.) The external support for John's Gospel, as we have already seen, is ample — fully as much so as for the other Gospels.

(2.) The air of naturalness and candor throughout the book,<sup>2</sup> — so obviously written "ad narrandum, and not ad probandum;"

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher : *Supernat. Origin*, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> See especially chapters ix. and xi.

the mention of minute and incidental particulars,<sup>1</sup> such as we look for only from an eye-witness, and which would multiply the chances of detection in a forgery; the introduction of subordinate clauses which add little or nothing of value to the information, but seem to be thrown in only because they are the vivid reminiscences of the historian;<sup>2</sup> the allusion to occurrences which the writer had not narrated, but which, it is taken for granted, are already familiar to the reader;<sup>3</sup> the modest reticence of the writer in regard to himself; the omission, by this Evangelist alone, of the Baptist's title, — it not being necessary to distinguish him from the other John, who

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the time of day. See i. 35; xiii. 21-25; xviii. 15-27; xix. 26, 27, 34, 35; xx. 3-9, 24-29.

<sup>2</sup> E. g. xiv. 31. Jesus had been discoursing to the disciples during the last supper; the clause, "Arise, let us go hence," is thrown into the account, and the discourse continues. We can imagine the disciples, or part of them, rising at the call, and then tarrying a moment till the address is finished. How natural the picture! Could it possibly be a fiction? See iii. 23; v. 2; viii. 1; xii. 21; xviii. 10.

<sup>3</sup> E. g. That John had been cast into prison, iii. 24; the anointing by Mary is assumed to be known, xi. 2, though not recorded by John till xii. 3. See i. 45, 46; vi. 67.

is kept in the back ground; the explanation of things familiar to every Jew<sup>1</sup>—showing that the book was written for a class of readers outside of Palestine, yet by one acquainted with Judea and Jewish ideas; the preservation of facts recorded by no other historian;<sup>2</sup> and the narration of facts seemingly injurious to the faith which the author seeks to propagate;<sup>3</sup> are all marks of historical truthfulness.<sup>4</sup>

(3.) The fourth Gospel claims to be the production of an eye-witness (i. 14; xix. 35);<sup>5</sup> and if not written by the Apostle John, it is the work of a forger, who adroitly seeks to convey that impression. The disciple whom Jesus loved and who leaned on his breast at supper (xxi. 20)<sup>6</sup> is declared to be the author (xxi. 24). A forger would have been more apt, as in the apocryphal Gospels, to place the name conspicuously in the fore-

<sup>1</sup> v. 2; vi. 4. "The Passover, a feast of the Jews."

<sup>2</sup> xviii. 13, 19-24.

<sup>3</sup> John vii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Farrar's *Life of Christ*, vol. i., p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> Compared with the 1st Ep. of John i. 1-3 and iv.

14.

<sup>6</sup> John xiii. 23; xix. 26; xx. 2-8; xxi. 7.

ground, instead of leaving it to be inferred from a careful comparison of passages.

(4.) The fourth Gospel is the diadem of Christian literature. Its heavenly spirit is unrivalled and incommunicable. For eighteen centuries it has been the comfort of aspiring hearts. The purest natures have been lifted up by it, but have not outgrown it. Now we know something of the men of the second century. Which of them was the transcendent genius which such a masterpiece of deception would imply? What rare intellectual gifts combined with the highest moral conceptions! If a forgery, we have this anomaly,—*intentional and deliberate fraud resulting in "the fairest picture of moral grandeur" extant in any language.*

(5.) In chapter xxi., verse 24, we have these words "and we know that his testimony is true." The author had been writing in the third person, but here at the close is a sudden change to the first person. This evidently was added by some other hand as a confirmation of John's truthfulness. According to early accounts, John delivered his Gospel to the Church of Ephesus first, having sustained peculiar relations to this church for



many years. It has been conjectured, with a high degree of probability, that this clause was the authentication from the elders of the Church of Ephesus, under whose direction this Gospel was copied to be sent to other churches. It is certain that they are not the words of John ; and by whomsoever written it is very early testimony to the genuineness of the fourth Gospel.

(6.) The acceptance of this Gospel by Christian antiquity as the genuine production of the Apostle John, from the time of his contemporaries downwards ; the acknowledgment of it by the early enemies of the Christian faith ; the clear internal evidence ; and the great improbabilities involved in the hypothesis of forgery, combine to afford a degree of certainty which has commanded the assent of some even of the most sceptical enquirers.

We have now gone over the chief items of proof relating to the genuineness of the four Gospels. As will be seen, the evidence is cumulative ; and to most minds, we believe, it will be decisive.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE CHARACTER OF JESUS.

HAVING ascertained that the Gospels are trustworthy records, we are prepared to consider the character therein pictured. But who can do justice to such a theme? We may gaze and wonder, but who will attempt an adequate presentation of such a personality? In moral grandeur, self-sacrifice, originality, and commanding influence over the hearts of men, it stands without a parallel.<sup>1</sup> It transcends all other characters in history. Men of every age and condition, learned and unlearned, have looked up to it as their brightest example. Painters, poets, philosophers, and moralists have found in it their loftiest ideal. The greatest minds have bowed in humble adoration. No one feels like attempting an analysis of this character; but a few obvious facts may be stated.

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<sup>1</sup> Farrar: *The Witness of History to Christ*, pp. 79-88.

(1.) Jesus was a good man. As, for the sake of argument, we have been treating the Gospels as truthful records merely, without saying anything as to whether they are inspired, so for the present, it will be borne in mind, we speak of Jesus merely as a historical personage, without affirming anything as to his supernatural character. Those who reject all belief in the supernatural, and who endeavor to explain away all that is miraculous in the life of Jesus, will freely concede all that is here said as to his character. On this point there will be no dispute.

In the days of his earthly life those who came in contact with him were impressed with his transparent honesty and sincerity of purpose, his perfect purity and innocence. They *felt* his moral superiority. And such is the irresistible impression now as we read the simple story of his life.

The Jewish rulers, it is true, rejected him, but their hostility can be accounted for. The Saviour's unsparing denunciation of their formality and hypocrisy, his failure to satisfy their worldly Messianic expectations, and his contempt for their highly esteemed oral traditions, were to their minds proof positive that

he was not the promised Messiah. The truth could not penetrate the triple mail of prejudice, pride, and worldliness in which they had encased themselves.

In spite of the powerful opposition of the ruling class, the common people heard him gladly. Unbiased minds were free to speak their admiration. Even those who had no sympathy with his teaching were convinced of his purity and honesty. Pilate said he found no fault in him. Pilate's wife regarded him as a just man. Judas declared that he himself had betrayed innocent blood. The thief on the cross said that Jesus had done nothing amiss. The centurion who superintended his crucifixion, overpowered by what he saw and heard during those six hours of agony, exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God." And those who had witnessed his death smote on their breasts and returned.

(2.) The outward conditions of the life of Jesus were most unfavorable. His life, up to the age of thirty years, was spent in obscurity, — in a retired village not celebrated for a high degree of morality or culture, but rather the reverse. His associates were not the educated and refined. His life was one

of poverty and toil, that of a carpenter working every day for the supply of bodily wants, with little opportunity for intellectual improvement. He had none but the commonest education. He had no influential friends. He died at the early age of thirty-three years, and had been before the public but three years. Yet, under these most unfavorable circumstances, he developed the most perfect, the most original, and the most influential character in history.<sup>1</sup>

(3.) He lived in an age of superstition. All men felt its power. The most enlightened philosophers were unable to free themselves entirely from the dreadful incubus. The Jewish teachers were no exception. And what was worse, they had in addition laid upon themselves the yoke of the oral law. They were in abject slavery to the tradition of the elders, which, with its ten thousand burdensome requirements, resulted in intolerable bondage to conscientious minds, while in those less earnest the result was formalism and hypocrisy. From all this Jesus was free, and taught others to be free also.

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Christ of History*, by John Young, pp. 31-49. New York, 1856.

(4.) The men of his nation were narrow and superficial. They were letter-worshipping, hair-splitting, morbid-minded, one-sided casuists. The grasp of *his* mind was broad and generous and untrammelled.

(5.) Without instructors, he displayed a more thorough insight into the Hebrew scriptures than any of the Jewish teachers. On several occasions, without warning, they approached him with some of the most intricate and difficult questions that had occupied the rival schools in which was concentrated the wisdom of the nation. Immediately — asking no time for reflection — comes his clear, discriminating reply, different from the solution of both schools, showing where each was right and each was wrong,<sup>1</sup> and this with a convincing power from which there could be no appeal.

(6.) The Messianic expectations of the Jews were in keeping with the slavish literalness of all their interpretation of Scripture. They expected the Messiah to be a great worldly prince, like Cæsar, who would first conquer and then rule the world; Jerusalem to be his capital, and the Jews still to retain their pre-

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<sup>1</sup> See Farrar's *Life of Christ*, vol. ii., pp. 152, 155.



eminence. Jesus told the people that he was the Messiah; but that his kingdom was not of this world. There was to be no outward pomp or splendor, but he was to reign in the hearts of men forever. His views of the Messiahship were not derived from any of the men of his time. They were entirely original.<sup>1</sup>

(7.) His originality is further seen in the fact that while religious reformers in general are anxious to secure the co-operation of the wealthy, the refined, and the influential, Jesus espoused the cause of the poor and the unlearned—a thing before that time unheard of. Antiquity took little account of the poor. They were scarcely regarded a part of society. If in the present day we are waking up to the discovery that the uplifting of the masses is the highest interest of society, it is a proof that the life of Jesus has at length begun to penetrate society and public history. It should also be noted that in identifying himself with the common people Jesus did not become a party leader, nor engender a party feeling, nor were the more cultivated

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<sup>1</sup>Young: *The Christ of History*, pp. 57-66.



classes of society repelled by his so doing, but rather attracted.<sup>1</sup>

(8.) No man of his time, either Jew or heathen, rose to such exalted and correct views of God and humanity. And not only was he immeasurably in advance of his age, but his work as the Founder of a new religion was most remarkable, as already intimated, in view of his early death (at the age of thirty-three years) and the shortness of his public life (three years). Think of it! an obscure carpenter in a country village, his life one of toil and poverty, without education, friends, or social influence, in the short period of three years, setting on foot a movement which has done more to comfort human hearts, purify society, promote civilization, and shape the history of the world than any other agency!

(9.) But we have not done with the character of Jesus. We find in him the harmonious combination of qualities which are seldom united in the same person. Men aim at moral perfection in heart and life, and the result is apt to be asceticism, or some other form of one-sidedness. They cultivate charity, and

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<sup>1</sup> Bushnell on *The Character of Jesus*, pp. 74-82. New York, 1867.

before they are aware, their charity has degenerated into an indifference to truth, which is falsely styled liberalism. If they cultivate gentleness and tenderness, it is liable to be at the sacrifice of force. In these matters men fail. But in the character of Jesus we find these apparently contradictory qualities in harmonious perfection. The matchless purity of his life is not marred by a single trace of asceticism. He manifested the broadest charity, but no false liberalism; dignity without pride or haughtiness; firmness and decision without being overbearing or unjust; gentleness and tenderness, but no lack of energy and force of character; he was meek and lowly in heart, yet ready, when necessary, to assert his own superior claims and to denounce sin and hypocrisy with the sternest severity; in him the highest intelligence was combined with a rich emotional nature and perfect self-control. In a word, we find in Jesus every element of strength without a single element of weakness.

(10.) The founders of other religions have made serious mistakes. Posterity has detected some imperfection in their teaching or their lives. A Hindoo boy does not have

to go to school very long to learn that there is no mountain 128,000 miles high, as his sacred books declare,—nor a sea of honey, nor one of sour milk. The Buddhist and Mohammedan ideals of society are disfigured by gross errors and misconceptions. But in all the progress of eighteen centuries, enlightened Christendom has not outgrown the teaching or the example of Jesus. Kingdoms rise and fall. Systems of philosophy decay and are forgotten. But Christianity never was stronger than it is to-day.

Here we may properly adduce the testimony of one of the best judges of human nature whom the world has ever seen. The Emperor Napoleon I. when conversing, as was his habit, about the great men of the ancient world, and comparing himself with them, turned, it is said, to Count Montholon, with the inquiry: "Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?" The question was declined, and Napoleon proceeded: "Well, then, I will tell *you*. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires: but upon what do these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus, alone, founded his empire upon love; and to this very day millions

would die for Him. . . . I think I understand something of human nature; and I tell you all these were men; and I am a man: none else is like Him! Jesus Christ was more than man. I have inspired multitudes with an enthusiastic devotion such that they would have died for me: but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present with the electric influence of my looks, of my words, of my voice. When I saw men and spoke to them I lighted up the flame of self-devotion in their hearts. . . . Christ, alone, has succeeded in so raising the mind of man towards the Unseen, that it becomes insensible to the barriers of time and space. Across a chasm of eighteen hundred years Jesus Christ makes a demand which is beyond all others difficult to satisfy: He asks for that which a philosopher may often seek in vain at the hands of his friend, or a father of his children, or a bride of her spouse, or a man of his brother: He asks for the human heart; He will have it entirely to Himself; He demands it unconditionally; and forthwith His demand is granted. Wonderful! In defiance of time and space, the soul of man, with all its powers and faculties, becomes an annexation to the

empire of Christ. All who sincerely believe in Him experience that remarkable supernatural love towards Him. This phenomenon is unaccountable; it is altogether beyond the scope of man's creative power. Time, the great destroyer, is powerless to extinguish this sacred flame: time can neither exhaust its strength nor put a limit to its range. This it is which strikes me most. I have often thought of it. This it is which proves to me quite convincingly the Divinity of Jesus Christ." Liddon's *Bampton Lectures*, 1866, p. 222.

Rousseau says: "If all were perfect Christians, individuals would do their duty; the people would be obedient to the laws; the magistrates incorrupt; and there would be neither vanity nor luxury in such a state. . . . I will confess that the majesty of the Scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the Gospel has its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers with all their pomp of diction: how contemptible are they compared with the Scriptures! Is it possible that a book at once so simple and sublime should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred



personage whose name it records should be himself a mere man? What sweetness, what purity in his manner! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live and so die without weakness and without ostentation? If the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God."

(II.) In connection with the character of Jesus, we must not fail to notice *the astounding pretensions which he made* — pretensions which, if not sustained, would have turned back the tide of popular favor, and set him down as an imbecile or a madman. Imagine any man, even the wisest and best, appearing nowadays before an audience and proclaiming, "I am perfectly sinless; I am faultless; repentance is no part of my religious life; you feel honored to be called the children of Abraham, but I claim to have existed before Abraham; you have the highest regard for Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, but I claim an authority over your hearts and lives superior to that of Moses; you point with pride to the splendor of Solomon's reign



as the golden age of your history, but behold a greater than Solomon is here." "Nay, more, your eternal salvation depends upon your reception of me." "He that believeth on me shall be saved." "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Such were the pretensions which Jesus made *and sustained*. There was something in his bearing, in his looks, in his tones and gestures, in his character, which convinced people that he had a right to speak as he did. They felt that they were not in the presence of an ordinary teacher. When he began his public life, the first thing connected with his teaching that impressed the people was his air of authority, such as the scribes did not possess; and near the close of his life the reluctant admission was wrung from his enemies, "never man spake like this man." There was something in the personality of Jesus which justified his unparalleled pretensions, and this is

the reason the people did not turn from him in disgust.<sup>1</sup>

(12.) It is difficult for a writer to delineate character correctly. Yet so delicately are the lines drawn in this picture which we have in the Gospels, that as we read them now, we are not shocked with the assumptions of Jesus, as we certainly would be if they were not properly a part of the picture. And herein is additional evidence that the Gospels are each a simple recital of facts. The case is different with the apocryphal writings of later date. These show by contrast which are fact and which are fiction. And that such a character should have been invented by the Jewish nation in its lowest decay, and committed to writing without a word of harshness or censure towards opposers, or a particle of national prejudice, would be itself a greater miracle than any recorded in the Gospels.<sup>2</sup>

(13.) As a part of the pretensions of Jesus, it should be noticed that he claimed to be laying the foundation of a kingdom that should

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<sup>1</sup> See Bushnell on *The Character of Jesus*. New York, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> Archbp. Thomson: article on "Gospels," in *Dict. of Bible*.

extend to all ages and all branches of the human race. Yet he manifested no uneasiness in regard to the final triumph of his doctrines, though men turned away from his teaching and refused to believe.<sup>1</sup> In those dark closing hours of his life, when apparently all was lost, he asserts himself the master of the situation. To human view his work was then a failure. Yet his words remind us of a commanding general when victory is assured.

(14.) And again: though the kingdom which he professed to be setting up would be dependent for its success on a truthful account of what he himself did and said, yet he made no earthly provision for the preservation of those precious teachings and facts. He wrote nothing himself, and was apparently indifferent as to whether any record of his life was kept.

In view of all these striking features of the life of Jesus, are we not compelled, in all candor, to conclude not only that he was the purest, the wisest, and the best of men, but that he was something more than man — that he was a supernatural person — as he claimed to be?

This prepares us for the next step.

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<sup>1</sup> Bushnell on *The Character of Jesus*.

## CHAPTER IV.

### JESUS WAS A WORKER OF MIRACLES.

THESE miracles were witnessed by multitudes, on a number of different occasions, during the three years of his public life. They were well known and talked of by all. So much so that at his last Passover, when it was known that the Jewish rulers sought to arrest Jesus to put him to death, the people asked in astonishment: "When Messiah cometh, will he do more miracles than this man?"

They were supported by testimony which was rendered reluctantly, from fear of persecution,—for example, that of the father and mother of the blind man (John ix.). They were also conceded by his enemies, who did not pretend to deny the miracles themselves, but ascribed them to satanic agency. That they did not deny them is proof that they were facts beyond question. (Compare Acts iv. 16.)

They were for the most part miracles of mercy, and thus served a double purpose. They authenticated Christ's divine mission, and at the same time illustrated its beneficent character.

Christ's miracles were not performed for display nor for the gratification of curiosity. They were to be taken in connection with his teaching. They were usually bestowed as the reward of faith, weak and imperfect though it might be. Nevertheless, if a man in need of healing had faith enough to believe in him as a worker of miracles, his physical restoration would prepare him for that higher exercise of faith which would result in spiritual blessing.<sup>1</sup>

The miraculous runs all through the Gospel. It appears on every page. It is so interwoven with the life of Jesus that it cannot be separated.<sup>2</sup> And the necessary inference

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<sup>1</sup> See "Miracles," *Dict. of Bible*.

<sup>2</sup> It is surprising to see by what methods some have sought to eliminate the supernatural from the Gospels. If the same ingenious sophistry is to be applied to other narratives, the study of history may as well be abandoned. The absurdity of these methods has been illustrated by Whately in his *Historical Doubts concerning Napoleon*.



may be stated in the words of Nicodemus: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Jesus himself claimed the power of working miracles, and that which this power involved. A few extracts will illustrate this.

When John the Baptist had been in prison for some time, he sent two of his disciples to inquire of Jesus whether he really was the promised Messiah. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." (Matt. xi. 2-6.)

"And behold there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." (Matt. viii. 2, 3.)

"And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? for



whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk? but that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." (Matt. ix. 4-6.)

Now from these and other passages it is plain that Jesus claimed to work miracles. This claim must be taken in connection with his character. If he was a man of unimpeachable honesty and truthfulness, it is certain that he was a performer of miracles. For him to assert such a claim when no miracles had been done by him would set him down as a falsifier, a pretender, an impostor. And for any one to deceive in matters of personal religion is the basest form of deception,—because religious hopes and feelings are the most sacred of our nature,—the last that should be trifled with. In the case before us there is no middle ground. We must either say that Jesus was a good man—the best of men—and a worker of miracles, as he claimed, or that he was a falsifier and a deceiver. We are shut up to a choice between these two alternatives, and it is

not doubtful what the verdict of humanity will be.<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving the subject of miracles, one objection may be noticed. If we receive the Gospel miracles on the testimony of those who claim to be eye-witnesses, are we not to believe in modern miracles on the same ground?

ANSWER. — Scarcely any reflecting person will consider the cases parallel. In matters of this kind, as in other things, why should there not be fraudulent imitations of the good and the true? The unapproachable excellence of the life of Jesus is beyond dispute. Is it so with the modern wonder-workers? Some of their pretended miracles have been shown to be fraudulent.

The character of Jesus and the claim of the Gospel miracles to our belief cannot be separated. When a modern wonder-worker appears whose miracles are supported by such a character, we will believe him.

The Gospel miracles then, we believe, are firmly established, and they show that Jesus is a Teacher sent from God.

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<sup>1</sup> Blauvelt: in *Scribner's Magazine*, March, 1873.

## CHAPTER V.

### JESUS CHRIST AROSE FROM THE DEAD.

IN the first place, he was really dead. Jewish hatred and Roman vigilance would combine to secure this result. The thrust of the broad-headed spear into his side and upward to the region of the heart, would destroy, as it was designed to do, any lingering trace of life.<sup>1</sup> And, if his character for truth has been established, his oft-repeated declaration that he was to die on the cross, sets this question at rest. Let us consider some of the proofs of Christ's resurrection :

I. The fact that Jesus rose again from the dead rests upon the statement of those who saw him after his resurrection ; the testimony of truthful, sober-minded men — men who were not anticipating such a result, and therefore not to be imposed upon by their eager imaginations. To the declaration that they had seen Jesus after his resurrection

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<sup>1</sup> Farrar : *Life of Christ*, vol. ii., p. 424.

these men firmly adhered to the end of their lives, though it cost them hardship and loss, persecution and death. Their testimony derives additional weight from the fact that at first they were very reluctant to accept such a truth. When informed by the women that they had seen a vision of angels, who told them that Jesus had arisen, their words seemed but idle tales. And afterwards, when Thomas was informed by the ten disciples that Jesus had appeared to them in his absence, he declared that he would not believe unless he saw in the Saviour's hands the print of the nails, and put his hand into the spear-wound in his side. This very test of the reality of the resurrection he was called upon to exercise at our Lord's next appearance a week later.

On at least ten different occasions Jesus showed himself alive after he arose, one of which appearances was in the presence of five hundred witnesses (1 Cor. xv. 6). Could such a multitude be imposed upon at once by their imaginations? And if these appearances were mere myths—the offspring of disordered imaginations—why did they not continue?

2. The change in the character of the Apostles. Before the resurrection of their Master they were weak, ignorant, selfish, vacillating men, sharing the worldly and narrow expectations of the Jews generally. After it they were enlightened, self-sacrificing, heroic missionaries, bent on winning the whole world to the saving knowledge of Christ. Whence this sudden and mighty revolution in character, this newly acquired insight into the true meaning of the Old Testament, this new-born idea of a spiritual kingdom to embrace the whole human race? These things can be readily accounted for in view of the facts of the Resurrection morning and the Day of Pentecost, and in no other way.

3. The declaration of Jesus himself before his crucifixion. He clearly and emphatically announced to the disciples on several occasions that he must be killed and the third day rise again. These declarations must be taken in connection with his unimpeachable truthfulness. Unless he was a deceiver, this places the fact of the resurrection beyond question.

4. The Christian Sabbath—the observance of the first day of the week in commemoration of this event—has stood for eighteen



centuries a witness to the faith of apostolic times.

5. If Jesus rose not, what became of his body? Was it stolen? By whom — friends or foes? If by friends, could the knowledge of this be kept from the Apostles? But the Apostles sincerely believed that he arose, as Renan and other unbelieving critics freely admit. Was the body stolen by foes? Then why did they not come forward and show this when the Apostles so boldly and successfully proclaimed the resurrection in the streets of Jerusalem a few days later? <sup>1</sup>

It is with manifest embarrassment that the attempt has been made to explain away the series of facts which cluster about this event.

6. The testimony of the Apostle Paul — the last in logical order — the first, however, that was announced to the cultured Gentile world, and still the first, to some minds, in convincing power. An intense hater of Christ and Christianity, this gifted and highly educated young Pharisee bent every energy of his ardent nature to the extermination of the hated sect. Having made havoc of the church

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<sup>1</sup> See Row on *The Supernatural in the New Test.*, chap. xx.



at Jerusalem, he set out with the purpose of doing the same at Damascus; when suddenly, at mid-day, he is stopped in the way, by the Lord Jesus himself, who supernaturally manifests himself, and convinces the persecutor of his error and his folly. (Acts ix.) From that moment he was a changed man. He was convinced that he had been persecuting his own Redeemer. The faith, which before he had sought to destroy, he now desired to propagate. To this work he thenceforward devoted himself with such tact, enthusiasm, courage, learning, and success, as to become, for all time, the representative man of Christianity.

If the lives of Plato and Seneca are each a part of history, so is the life of Paul. If sincerity and truth can be attributed to any man, surely they will not be denied to him. And that he believed that the Lord Jesus appeared to him is a fact beyond question. How can it be explained away? Was he imposed upon by legerdemain? was it an attack of insanity? or was he struck by lightning? None of these explanations will bear scrutiny. His subsequent life is more than an answer. If a stroke of lightning,

would not those who were with him be aware of this? Would not he himself remember the storm? If insanity, how explain the three days' blindness, and the voice, which was also heard by his companions? He was not insane when shortly after he mightily persuaded the Jews in the synagogues, from the Old Testament Scriptures, that Jesus was indeed the Christ. The sorcerers of Ephesus did not think him insane when, under his preaching, they brought their books together and burned them.

It is hard to over-estimate the value of Paul's testimony to the supernatural character of Jesus; *and it is only one of many converging lines of evidence.*

## CONCLUSION.

THE Gospels are authenticated by many converging lines of evidence external and internal.

2. If they were less fully supported than they are, the life and character of Jesus, which they portray, would still be its own vindication; because it could not possibly have been a fictitious invention of the age in which it appeared.

3. If any further evidence were needed, it is furnished by the historical development of Christianity during the past eighteen hundred years, and its perfect adaptation to the spiritual wants of humanity; so that the stone which the Jewish builders rejected has now become the head-stone of the corner. It is the life of society and the strength of modern civilization. Could this life and teaching of Jesus have been an invention of the Jewish mind in its lowest decay?

4. The conclusion then is irresistible that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

5. If this is so, the supernatural government of the world in the interest of truth and righteousness, and the interposition of miraculous agency at important junctures in the history of the race, are nothing to stumble our faith.

6. Jesus being a Divine Teacher, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which he recognized as the inspired word of God, are to be received as such by us. And if the organic law of the Old dispensation, so to speak, was the result of Divine inspiration, much more may we believe the same of the New-Testament writings. This strong presumption in favor of the inspiration of the books of the New Testament rises to certainty when we read our Lord's promises to send the Holy Spirit to guide the disciples into all truth. John xiv. 26; xvi. 13; and the claim which the Apostles make for their own writings. 2 Peter iii. 16; Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

7. God reigns in the kingdoms both of nature and of grace; any apparent discrepancies between science and the Bible will

therefore vanish when both are rightly understood.

8. Immortality and eternal life are not dreams, but realities.

9. Repentance, faith, and personal consecration are our duty and our highest wisdom.

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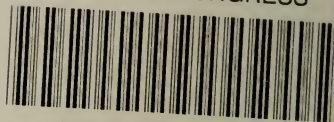
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